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JEWISH ACTION

AND

JEWISH IDEALS

By

SIR PHILIP MAGNUS, Bart., M.P.

Reprinted from the *Jewish Chronicle*,
November 13, 1891.

LONDON:

Printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street,
Kingsway, W.C. 2.

1917

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From the "Jewish Chronicle," April 9, 1909.

ZIONISM AT THE UNIVERSITIES

To the Editor of the "Jewish Chronicle."

Sir,—In an interview with Mr. Norman Bentwich ("Jewish Chronicle," March 26) the following passage occurs :—

> Interviewer : But do they (the Zionist students) feel that they can completely *identify* themselves with the English nation?
>
> Mr. N. Bentwich : They feel that, as Jews, this is not possible. They cannot be as entirely English in thought as the man who is born of English parents and descended from ancestors who have mingled their blood with other Englishmen for generations. . . . There is no use disguising this fact. To me it seems impossible to separate religion from nationality in Judaism.

Assuming the accuracy of this report, we, the undersigned graduates and members of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London, desire to state as emphatically as possible :—

1. We deeply deplore the statement that Jews are not, and can never be, "entirely English in thought." We object to the distinction made between Jews and persons "born of English parents." For we contend that Jews can be, and are, born of English parents even though their parents are Jews. When an alien has become naturalised he is an Englishman in his rights and obligations, and we hold that it is his duty to see to it that his children shall grow up, as Jews, "entirely English in thought"—as English in aspiration, interest and zeal as those who are "descended from ancestors who have mingled their blood with other Englishmen for generations."

2. While we may hold different conceptions of Judaism, we all agree in repudiating the suggestion that Judaism does not allow its adherents to become "entirely English in thought."

3. We regard it as dangerous that the rising generation of educated Jews should be encouraged in opinions which (a) must tend to alienate them from other Englishmen, (b) demolish the structure of the arguments advanced, for example, by Lord

Macaulay, on which the Act for the Removal of Jewish Disabilities was supported, and (c) are likely to arouse some suspicion in all classes of society, and particularly in the working-classes among whom Jewish immigrants have to make their way, as to the measure of patriotism among English Jews.

4. We gladly learn that undergraduates adhering to the cause advocated by Mr. Norman Bentwich will "not regard themselves as a nation apart from the English people," and that they will be "prepared to exercise fully their rights and duties as English citizens." But we desire to point out that these concessions are really of no adequate avail. We do not believe that it is logical for persons to claim "rights and duties as English citizens" when they assert in the same breath that they cannot "completely identify themselves with the English nation," and cannot be "entirely English in thought." We fear that Englishmen of other creeds may not be equally confident as to the future ability of men trained in these views to "exercise fully their rights and duties as English citizens," and thus the apprehensions we have already expressed become increasingly grave.

Yours obediently,

ARTHUR COHEN.
R. WALEY COHEN.
ISRAEL DAVIS.
O. E. D'AVIGDOR-GOLDSMID.
A. EICHHOLZ.
STANLEY J. FAY.
I. GOLLANCZ.
ISIDORE HARRIS.
H. S. Q. HENRIQUES.
J. D. ISRAEL.
A. LEVINE.
JULIAN G. LOUSADA.
LAURIE MAGNUS.
PHILIP MAGNUS.
C. G. MONTEFIORE.
JOSEPH POLACK.
RICHARD H. RAPHAEL.
LEOPOLD DE ROTHSCHILD.
HARRY S. SAMUEL.
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This Article is reprinted as written in 1891, but the author has added some few notes.

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To many it may seem that there is an inexplicable contradiction in the Jewish character. In the long-drawn-out history of the Jews—a history stretching back into mythical times, the end of which is in the ages yet unborn—no feeling has been more strongly expressed in the thoughts of the people than the desire for a restoration to Palestine. No exiles ever turned with more loving heart to the land of their birth than have Jews turned to Judæa. The wish to reoccupy the fertile plains of Jordan, to sit in the shadow of the ruins of the Temple, to sleep beneath the dust trodden by their ancestors centuries ago, has been a leading theme in the literature of the Jews, colouring their poetry and their prayers. Nevertheless, how few genuine attempts have been made by the Jews to recover their lost inheritance. They turn towards the East morning and evening, their supplications are full of hopes for a speedy return to Zion, and yet, since their dispersion, by their own exertions they have done but little to bring about the restoration of the political independence, to which so many confidently look forward as the forerunner of the Messianic age.

With true Oriental resignation they lean upon the promise, "The Lord will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

This belief in the fulfilment of prophecy has on more than one occasion roused the seemingly latent energies of the people to give a half-hearted support to the shallow pretensions of would-be Messiahs, and has stamped a portion of the Jews at least as credulous dupes rather than as "unbelievers," as they are commonly called. On the strength and steadfastness of this belief such pretenders as Bar Cochba and Sabbatai Zebi relied for the temporary success they gained. But attempts such as these, although they gave a passing reality to the people's hopes, were but poor and sorry efforts on the part of a dispossessed nation to recover their lost country.

It might have been thought that a people, racially one, united even in dispersion by such ties as a common language, trustworthy traditions, a glorious past, and a sacred mission, would have been capable of worthier efforts for the restoration of their nationality than any which the history of nearly eighteen centuries records. It cannot be said that Jews lack courage. No people ever fought better against overwhelming forces than did the Jews against Titus, nor, indeed, are they found wanting when they stand shoulder to shoulder beside their Christian comrades on the modern field of battle.[1] They possess, and always have possessed, resources, and have largely helped to supply the necessary material for many European wars; and their worst detractors have never doubted their intelligence or their organising skill. Why is it, then, that with qualities such as these, so

[1] Striking evidence of this fact has been shown in the present world-war.

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well adapted to ensure success in the conception and execution of a great rising, the Jews, among all other peoples, have been content to remain a byword and reproach, accepting the position of the persecuted and seemingly preferring it to that of "them that persecute," without having ever struck a well-aimed blow nor effected a well-planned scheme to realise by the prowess of their arm or the wisdom of their brain the aspirations of their national hopes and their individual supplications? This is the contradiction to be explained. Can the so-called national idea in Judaism—the idea that fixes each man's thoughts on Zion and his hopes on a restoration of Judæa—be a vague yearning and nothing more, exerting, and destined to exert, no influence whatever on Jewish action, not even of sufficient actuality to marshal the people the way that they should go? It would seem so. Yet the idea is deep-seated in the nation's mind. Mark the success that has attended the recent efforts of a few well-meaning agitators to band together numbers of poor Jewish refugees by the hope of a return to Palestine. Driven to these hospitable shores by persecutions, the record of which will be a lasting blot on the page of European history, they have naturally pictured to themselves the home of their ancestors as a haven of peace and plenty. The picture of any other home, though it flowed with milk and honey, would have failed to awaken in their hearts the enthusiasm which the idea of a restored nationality, with its centre in Jerusalem, has undoubtedly kindled among the members of the Society of Chovevi Zion. Their leaders well knew the note to strike with most effect, and they have struck it. But the note vibrated only in the hearts and memories of those who heard it, and the enthusiasm it aroused was spent in the cheer accorded to those who struck it. It

quickened into fuller life the hope transmitted through generations of sufferers, but its vitality was still too feeble to touch the springs of action. What, then, is the practical worth of an idea that can effect so little?

But may it be that the idea is but the mental image of a mission to be otherwise fulfilled? Those of us who believe that through the vicissitudes of a nation's history a Divine purpose runs, and that there is a truthful ring in the prophetic words, "This people I have formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise," may doubt whether the fulfilment of the national idea of Judaism lies in the restoration of the Jewish nationality. They may think, and may be allowed to urge others to think, that the establishment of a Jewish Government in Palestine would leave the national idea as unfulfilled as now. Would the prophet's vision of the expansive mission of Judaism be satisfied by the picture of Israel sitting among the nations like a modern Greece or Bulgaria? Surely it is not by such national control, nor by the exercise of power such as those nations wield, that the Jews are to exert their spiritual influence—that Israel is to show forth God's praise!

All history, whether of individual or national life, is a record of development. Israel is no exception to the law. Sprung from a single family, which grew into a tribe, to develop into a nation, and ultimately to become a scattered people. The mission to be accomplished is the people's; its promise was in the family from which they sprang. For the Jews to revert to the position of a nation among nations would be a step backward, a reversal of the law of historical development. There have been nations who before now have lost their terri-

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tory, and who afterwards have, wholly or in part, regained it; but such events have been but ripples in the waves of the nation's life. There have been nations whose individuality has been destroyed, and whose existence has been merged into that of other peoples. But not so Israel. The blow that destroyed the stronghold of the Jews, and scattered them among the nations of the earth, was but the opening of a new chapter in the history of their life. In the building up of the Schools and in the consolidation of the Talmud, Israel advanced a step forward in the fulfilment of its destiny. The dispersion, the conquest of Canaan and the destruction of the shrines of idolatry, were but incidents in the realisation of the national idea. The goal towards which Israel has been ever moving has been frequently hidden from the sight of the people, who have seemed like blind agents in the perfection of the Divine plan. Of the Hebrews who went forth from Egypt there were many who still yearned for the flesh-pots they had left behind. As the Psalmist tells us, "They provoked the Lord in the wilderness." They wished to return, not knowing that there is no return for those who have once gone forth to accomplish a mighty mission. Looking back through the long vista of bygone ages, we can feel with those who preferred the ills they had to others they knew not of. It was a future full of doubts and difficulties on which the newly emancipated slaves hesitatingly entered. The life was hard and strange to them; and it needed all the confidence and encouragement of their leaders to uphold the waverers. In their advance they were guided by heavenly signs, symbolic of the great idea which was to enter into their national existence. Such visible signs are now wanting, but we may now, equally as then, distrust the hand that points backward. It may be—who

can say?—that Zion will again become the centre of God's cult. But Zion secured by the goodwill of foreign Powers is a vision which no true prophet ever saw. Not in our days, nor by the skill of generals, nor by the strength of legions, will Israel's mission be accomplished. The Return may come: but it will come by other means and in other times.

And may we not herein see the reconciliation of what appears contradictory in the Jewish character? United with the strong desire for national existence, symbolising the Divine thought which Israel as a people embodies, is found an unwillingness and an unfitness on their part for active interference with the political forces around them. At times there arise those who, purposely or unwittingly misunderstanding the true significance of the national idea, produce a temporary disturbance in the steady progress of the wave that is making for the shore. But the shore will certainly be reached when the people have worked out their own salvation. As witnesses of the Lord, their duty is in testifying, by their separate existence, to God's superintending Providence, and by their individual lives to the abiding laws of right and to the essential truths of religion. Is the world so perfect that there is no room for a people charged with such a mission? Are there no lands in which Israel may yet work and find, making those lands richer in material and spiritual wealth? The exodus of the Jews from a country where they are now forced to drink the waters of affliction may not be an unqualified evil. Russia of to-day, like Egypt of old, may be a mere instrument for accelerating the dispersion of the Jews into lands needing their presence. It may be for some wise purpose hidden from our view that the heart of the modern

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Pharaoh has been hardened.[1] Not for the first time do Jews suffer persecution. The past holds out to them the helpful and hopeful hand of promise. The bondage they now endure evokes, and should evoke, our practical sympathy and aid. As individuals we feel for them and work for them; but amid their present lamentations we hear a voice crying to them, and beneath their present sorrows we recognise a force urging them, to take a fuller part in the great civilising mission assigned to them as Israelites. They, too, have to conquer their Canaan.

And if, as we believe, the time has not yet come, nor is likely in the near future to arrive, for any re-establishment of Israel's political nationality or restitution of Palestine to the Jews; if the separate and independent existence of a Jewish State would tend to impede rather than to promote the realisation of the national idea in Judaism by disguising the true significance of that idea, and by compromising the position of Jews in other lands, it is no wonder that they should instinctively have turned aside, even in times of greatest tribulation, from using, for a purpose for which they and the world are

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1 This was written more than a quarter of a century ago. At that time the Jews of Russia, with the connivance of the ruling powers, were the victims of cruel persecution, from which many escaped to the United States and other countries. In the recent revolution, which dethroned the Czar, the Jews are known to have taken an active part; but they did so, not with a view to the restoration of Jewish nationality in Palestine, but in the endeavour to secure for the Russian people as a whole, of whom they formed a large section, freedom to live their own lives in common with all other Russian citizens and immunity from the tyranny of the ruling classes, from which they, more than other sections of the people, had suffered. It has been said that the Revolution will prove to be the death-blow to the general acceptance by Russian Jews of the idea of National Zionism, and so it should be, for the Jews in Russia, as loyal subjects of the present Provisional Government, should devote their energies, their well-known organising abilities, and their intellectual efforts to the building up of a new and free Russia, occupying a foremost place among the civilising nations of the world.

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not yet prepared, the moral and material forces they undoubtedly possess. They have their work to do scattered among the nations of the earth, and they do it best by living, so far as is consistent with their sacred mission, according to the manner of the people with whom they live. Racially and religiously separate, their duties as citizens of the land of their adoption are clear and well defined. Politically, they have no aspirations distinct from those of their fellow countrymen.[1] On the field of battle and in the council chamber they are of those among whom they dwell. They have not, nor is there any need that they should have, separate or conflicting interests. Nevertheless, there exists between Jews in all parts of the world a real bond of union—a bond which, inherent in the race, is essentially a moral and religious one. It is the bond which, with the fulfilment of Israel's mission, will unite all mankind. For its maintenance, all the laws, the observance of which constitutes the Jews a separate people, have been established and are obeyed. Amid the conflicts between the changing religion and the equally changing science of the day, amid the varying social laws which men assume and drop, there exist permanent truths and principles underlying the religion and the teachings of the Jews; and the maintenance of those principles and the dissemination of them among the peoples of the earth is the true mission of Israel.

To the accomplishment of this end, the Jews, racially

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[1] Recent events have undoubtedly justified such action as has been taken to dispel the idea that the Jews in every country owe a double allegiance—an idea that has given rise to the belief that they have international sympathies and leanings, and that, as faithful Jews, they cannot feel the same undivided loyalty to the country of their birth as their fellow-citizens of other religions. This idea, which certain aspects of political Zionism would seem to encourage, is wholly incorrect.

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united, retain in their dispersion the memories, traditions, and hopes of a nation; but their nationality is a sentiment without influence on their political action, and their country is a land bounded by no disputed or disputable frontiers. Together with other inherited qualities they possess that of adaptability to the conditions under which they live and work, and this quality stamps them as law-abiding citizens in the land in which they dwell. Wherever they are settled there they help, consciously or unconsciously, to fulfil their civilising mission, and until all may be accomplished that is implied in the prophetic promise, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord," the striving towards this end is the true mission of the Jews, and in the recognition of this duty lies the national idea in Judaism.

PHILIP MAGNUS.

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JUDAISM AND POLITICS

Views of the late Chief Rabbi,

THE VERY REVEREND DR. HERMANN ADLER.

When we dwelt in the Holy Land we had a political organisation of our own; we had judges and kings to rule over us. But ever since the conquest of Palestine by the Romans, we have ceased to be a body politic: we are citizens of the country in which we dwell. We are simply Englishmen, or Frenchmen, or Germans, as the case may be, certainly holding particular theological tenets and practising special religious ordinances; but we stand in the same relation to our countrymen as any other religious sect, having the same stake in the national welfare and the same claim on the privileges and duties of citizens. To Mr. Goldwin Smith's question, What is the political bearing of Judaism? I would reply that Judaism has no political bearing whatever.

Nineteenth Century, July, 1878.

P.T.O.

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The great bond which unites Israel is not one of race, but the bond of a common religion. We regard all mankind as brethren. We consider ourselves citizens of the country in which we dwell, in the highest and fullest sense of the term, and esteem it our dearest privilege and duty to labour for its welfare. Is there aught incompatible with our devotion to humanity and with our patriotism, if, at the same time, we feel sympathy for those who profess the same religious faith and practise the same religious ordinances, whether they inhabit this country or other lands? If the bond which unites Jews were, in truth, tribal, it would be a matter of perfect indifference to us what might be the religious belief or practice of our brethren in race. But the bare fact that we regard as apostates those of our fellow Jews who abandon their faith, is proof sufficient that religion is the main bond.

Nineteenth Century, Dec., 1881.

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